The Ch'ing often broke through the Great Wall and raided parts of the North China plain. However, they did not succeed in obtaining a permanent foothold south of the Wall until internal rebellion had fatally weakened their opponents. The last of the Ming to rule in Peking made desperate but vain efforts to retrieve the declining fortunes of his house. Resistance against the repeated attacks of the Manchus impoverished an already depleted treasury. The death blow was a rebellion led by Li Tzu-ch'eng, son of a village headman in Shensi. Famine and taxation had driven Li, as they have many another Chinese, to turn brigand. He proved an able general and disciplinarian, in 1642 captured K'aifeng and made himself master of Shensi, and in 1644 proclaimed himself Emperor of a new dynasty. In the latter year he marched upon Peking and took it, the Ming Emperor, in despair, hanging himself as the city fell.

On the northeastern frontier, holding it against the Manchus, was a Chinese general, Wu San-kuei. When Peking passed out of Ming hands, goaded on by the murder of his father by Li and by Li's seizure of a favorite concubine, he joined forces with the Ch'ing. The combined armies defeated Li in the open field and took the capital (1644). Li Tzu-ch'eng retreated westward and southward, his armies melted away, and he was soon eliminated—whether killed in Hupeh, as one report has it, or finding safety, incognito, in a Buddhist monastery and becoming a monk, as another account declares, is unimportant from the standpoint of the later history of the Empire.

The Manchus, although safely ensconced in Peking and supported by the powerful Wu San-kuei, found the conquest of the remainder of China no easy task. The adherents

of the Ming made a determined resistance and might conceivably have held part of the country for an indefinite period had it not been for unfortunate weaknesses at the top. The Ming aspirants to the throne were inept and dissensions unnerved their supporters. The Ch'ing took Yangchow with great slaughter and not long thereafter Nanking fell to them (164S). One of the Ming claimants set up his headquarters in Chekiang, but soon fled, took refuge in a fleet, lived a semi-piratical life, and died in 1662. Another, who had attempted to establish himself in Fukien, perished when the enemy carried their victorious arms through the province. Still